HAARETZ

Up Next

'Food Is Harmful. We Should Choose Other Types of Pleasure, Like Running or Sex'

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy speaks via live-stream in Habima Square in Tel Aviv, on Sunday. Credit: Moti Milrod

Israel News

Ukrainians Saved Jews in the Holocaust? Fact-checking Zelenskyy's Knesset Speech

Zelenskyy, in his address to Israeli lawmakers, made a number of claims about Ukraine and the Holocaust — but some of them are not quite accurate

Ofer Aderet and Liza Rozovsky
Mar. 21, 2022

Alongside a comparison of the Russian invasion of his country to the Holocaust, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's speech to the Knesset on Sunday night also

Haaretz's reporters have fact-checked the address.

"Listen to what is sounding now in Moscow. Hear how these words are said again: 'Final solution.' But already in relation, so to speak, to us, to the 'Ukrainian issue.'"

Russian President Vladimir Putin has never publically spoken of a "Final Solution" to the Ukrainian people, as Zelenskyy claimed. Although there is debate over what actually motivated Putin to invade Ukraine, many people think he is trying to realize his territorial ambitions in the region, not to carry out a genocide against the Ukrainian people.

Nevertheless, Zelenskyy is not the first to make this comparison. A column published – and later removed – by Russia's RIA news agency said that "Vladimir Putin has assumed, without a drop of exaggeration, a historic responsibility by deciding not to leave the solution of the Ukrainian question to future generations."

"The Ukrainians made their choice 80 years ago. They rescued Jews."

Roughly 1.5 million Ukrainian Jews were murdered in the Holocaust. Historians say the Germans would have found it very hard to kill that many Jews in such a short time without local assistance. According to testimonies, Ukrainians helped the Germans find, round up and transport Jews to the death camps. In many cases, Ukrainians did not just indirectly assist in the murder of Jews – they killed them themselves.

'Holocaust is not war': Israeli ministers, lawmakers slam Zelenskyy's speech

Zelenskyy's harsh Knesset address wasn't aimed at Israeli decision makers

"The Righteous Among the Nations are among us."

Indeed, 2,673 Ukrainians have been recognized as such by the Yad Vashem Holocaust remembrance center, with the fourth most people recognized as having saved Jews. But the memorial stresses that such comparisons are insignificant because these people were the exception, not the rule.

"You saw Russian missiles hit Kyiv, Babyn Yar. You know what kind of land it is. More than 100,000 Holocaust victims are buried there."

After the Ukrainians initially claimed that Russia had bombed Babyn (or Babi) Yar, where tens of thousands of Jews were killed by the Nazis and their local collaborators over 48 hours in 1941, the memorial site told Haaretz that the monument there was not damaged by the attacks. But Natan Sharansky, chairman of the Babyn Yar Holocaust Memorial Center, said that a building under construction that is slated to be used by one of the site's museums was damaged, and so was the site's access road.

Nevertheless, it is believed that the likely target for the strikes was not Babi Yar, but the nearby television tower.

At the same time, Zelenskyy made no mention of the fact that Ukrainians played a major role in the mass murder at Babi Yar. They may not have pulled the trigger, but they brought the Jews to the site and guarded the area. After the war, a senior Nazi officer even testified that so many Ukrainian informants had revealed Jews' hiding places to the Germans that the Nazis could not manage to kill them all.

Comments

Name

Enter the commenter display name

Comment

By adding a comment, I agree to this site's Terms of use

Send

Sort comment by Newest first

10

Who cares 19:56 22.03.2022

0 0

So thousands of Ukrainians including Jews have been murdered at this point, their cities reduced to rubble and here we have an article criticizing the Jewish president's imprecision on history. What do you think the dead Holocaust survivor, murdered by the Russians thought on this issue as he struggled for survival in vain and perhaps wondered if the Jewish state would come rescue him.

Reply Report

9

Didier 12:10 22.03.2022

0 0

The difference between a shlimiel, a shlemazel and a nudnik ? When the soup spills over, the one spilled it is the shlimiel, the one who got the soup on his shirt is the shlemazel and the nudnik is the one who wants to know what kind of soup it was. STOP BEING NUDNIKIM !

Reply Report

8

concerned citizen 11:18 22.03.2022

I can't believe it! Zelensky is begging for help to save his people and his country, and we are quibbling over whether he got his history right or wrong. How can you so miss the point?

Reply Report

7

J D 02:56 22.03.2022

0 0

How dare they? Holocaust is a brand, I mean atrocity, like the only one in human history, reserved for Israel.
You guys use the Holocaust to do what you like but I bet you there is far more solidarity between victims of human crime as they march to whichever grave through whatever injustice, than they feel as a Jew or Muslim or whatever. Simply disgusting how the living use the victims for politics. Injustice is injustice but yes I understand you need to USE them for political means. Obviously some acts of cruel murder are worse than others. Good for you

Reply Report

6

The Duke 22:27 21.03.2022

0 0

My god, a politician who painted the rosiest picture he could, when the truth is split more against what he says than for. So what? Has he got a reason? More than most politicians you'll ever vote for,

Reply Report

5

Mark Mazur 22:27 21.03.2022

0 0

"Historians say the Germans would have found it very hard to kill that many Jews in such a short time without local assistance."
Who says so?
The Jews were confined to ghettos and, from the ghettos, two years later sent straight to death camps.
The Germans were assisted by locals: Jewish administration and Jewish Police.
Only from the Warsaw Ghetto 350,000 were deported by about 1000 Jewish policemen and, they say, sixty Germans.
But the main reason it was so fast and easy is the fact the Jews were confined to ghettos already, there was no way out.

Reply Report

Sol 23:51 21.03.2022 → *Mark Mazur*

0 0

You are a real piece of work - 60 Germans? Right, Mr. Goebels. I am sure in your "brain" whatever happened to the Jews of Europe was their own fault and the result of their own actions.

Reply Report

4

Mark Mazur 22:18 21.03.2022

0 0

So Ukraine is burning but we are finding "faults" in the Ukrainians - in the safety of our iPhones and gated communities.
btw correctly they were recruited by the Germans Ukrainian mercenaries (later former Soviet POWs - so-called Hiwi volunteers, frequently Russians, at least 600,000 of them).
Let's not forget the Jewish Police - a volunteer formation that did the same.

Reply Report

Sol 23:47 21.03.2022 → *Mark Mazur*

0 0

The man, a public figure, gave a speech that included many inaccuracies and exaggerations, not the first. The article's writer is simply pointing those out, not calling for discontinuing support. Zelensky is no dummy, he knows the truth and knows what he needs to say to maintain support at home while trying to get outside countries to provide aid. Much the same as he's beating the drum of no-fly-zone knowing full well that NATO will never do that. Israel should be commended for providing humanitarian aid and trying to mediate a peaceful resolution despite the history and despite the lack of Ukrainian, or Russian for that matter, support in international forums or elsewhere. It is just doing the right thing.

Reply Report

3

context is everything 21:[illegible] 2022

1930s. early 1940s saw fascist/Nazi parties in every Western country. Some suggest that USA might have joined Hitler in WW2 because of its Nazi party. Japan fixed that. Going to Hitler's occupations, those occupied countries saw their Nazi parties recruited by Hitler's for evil. Reading this chat, it seems that so many people still assign the worst of a group on the whole group. That is not how people are treated today. With the old idea that all Ukrainians were bad, Zelensky was elected by 73% of the vote, a number unheard of in democracies today, with public knowledge that he was Jewish. This is not anti-Semitism. I suspect that discussion here has not to do with Ukrainians but the dilemma Israelis have over the plight of Palestinians who also champion themselves to be free on their land, calmly, safely, without a military force over its head. Sad state of affairs when Ukrainians today get dumped on because the Israeli public has their own trouble to deal with right and wrong.

Reply Report

Sol 23:30 21.03.2022 →*context is everything*

0 0

Has nothing to do with the Palestinians and where are you getting anti-Semitism, certainly not from the writer of the article! The points that are being made is that he is exaggerating and distorting history. That is all. The writer certainly has not said that the Ukrainian people deserve what is happening to them or that nobody should provide aid. The speech was inflammatory, no doubt about that, but that can be both understood and forgiven due to the dire circumstances. The first victim in war is the truth, Israel knows that all too well, which is why it continues to provide aid, construct a field hospital in Ukraine, and is desperately trying to mediate a peaceful solution.

Reply Report

Context is everything 02:13 22.03.2022 →*context is everything*

0 0

You are wrong about Israeli el not being controlled by its racism towards Palestinians. There will have to be a transformation of Israel's racist policies to Palestinians if Israel does [illegible] Ukrainians. That underlies many articles

Reply Report

Sol 15:51 22.03.2022 →*context is everything*

0 0

You should change your name to "tunnel vision is everything". What Israel does for the Ukrainians has nothing to do with the Palestinians and your comments are mere propaganda, particularly since no Palestinian political faction of note has come out against what Russia is doing! Also, perhaps the Palestinians should also change their racist attitudes toward Jews? Would be a good start to actually trying to make peace as opposed to constant rejectionism and racism!

Reply Report

Context is everything. 17:04 22.03.2022 →*context is everything*

0 0

Sol: You are blinded by your adherence to Putin's propaganda to denounce Zelensky's extraordinary leadership. You are persistent. You are a standa, hiding as a Putin dupe.

Reply Report

context is everything 18:18 22.03.2022 →*context is everything*

0 0

Shanda not standa

Reply Report

Troll Patrol 18:43 22.03.2022 →*context is everything*

0 0

@Context is everything. And you are a Russian troll, hiding in plain sight.

Reply Report

0 0

Of course this severe fact checking is extremely correct. You could have easily added, on top of it, that the main reason why Golda Meir was coming from Ukraine was that Ukraine itself was the centre ot the 1918-1921 pogroms that preceded the Shoah. So what? Should Zelensky have been more accurate? Your perfect critic reminds me judge Wilmot examining the Brodetsky case (Koestler's "Thieves in the night"), and Weistein's (Brodetsky's lawyer) defensive plea: " If I have a madman at my heels, and I see an autobus passing, I shall jump onto the platform regardless of traffic regulations. I leave it to your Worship to decide whether the bus conductor would be right in pushing me off the platform because I boarded the vehicle outside the prescribed stop". Zelenskyy has a killer (but not exactly a madman) at his heels, and you write a piece about his inaccuracies...

Reply **Report**

Ms. Historian 16:45 21.03.2022 → *Carlo Momigliano*

0 0

@Carlo Momigliano: There are "inaccuracies" and gross inaccuracies, like the ones in Zelensky's speech. And he knew it. And he knew you and yours would react the way you just have.

Reply **Report**

1

DaveM 14:15 21.03.2022

1 0

So, Ukrainians did save jews, and some also killed or helped kill them. Pretty much like everywhere else.

Reply **Report**

Edna Krabappel 15:46 21.03.2022 → *DaveM*

0 0

@DaveM: The Remedial Reading Comprehension re-test will be given in 2 weeks. Your failure on the March 19th exam automatically grants you a place on the re-test.

Reply **Report**

1 0

Brenda: Your use of "the Ukrainians" is revealing a pure racist attitude. Yes, the Ukrainian Nazis became part of Hitler's forces. They were some Ukrainians, certainly not "The Ukrainians". I guess that you believe that when a Jew is evil, like Madoff or Epstein, you will say "The Jews" were evil. Welcome to the 21st century from your racist attitudes. Wake up to what you are saying.

Reply **Report**

In Case You Missed It

How the Zionist left lost its coolest warrior

'Food is harmful. We should choose other types of pleasure, like running or sex'

Ukraine Is the beginning of the end for Putin, says ‘Steele dossier’ author

‘Anti-Zionist’ congregation stirs emotion in Chicago’s Jewish community

Ukraine war exposes how Russian oligarchs' dirty money has polluted the Jewish world

In the News

How Insurance Companies Use Management Fees to Dip Into Your Savings

Pegasus in the Caribbean? Israeli Spyware Reportedly Used in Trinidad and Tobago